

THE LIFE AND WORK OF ST. PAUL.

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NOTE.—This is the second article in this series and the reader is referred to page 2 of No. 19 for the connections. This article begins with the second subdivision.

II. THE SPECIAL PREPARATION FOR THE GOSPEL MINISTRY.

Introductory.—Under this division we shall consider a brief period of about six years in the life of the Apostle extending from his departure from Judea to his call from Tarsus to Antioch by Barnabas. The source of information is chiefly the "Acts" with incidental statements in the Epistles. The limit of this article forbids the critical study of the material from which the general remarks stated below are given.

Leaving Judea.—Mad desire refuses to be hemmed in by any bounds. History seems to emphasize this statement with added force when that madness directs itself against a harmless and innocent people. And so it was with Saul. His exceeding madness (Acts 26: 11) impelled him to undertake with much zeal otherwise hard and difficult tasks. Judea was a field much too narrow for the execution of his deep-laid purpose. Nothing but the complete annihilation of the "sect of Nazarenes" can satiate his intense hatred of the abominable heresy. Even the necessity of putting a disciple—perhaps the kindest and humblest of men or the most lovable and innocent of woman,—to death was no bar to his purpose. The man with whom we now deal felt himself to be doing, what he supposed to be the will of God, but imperfectly (Acts 29: 9) while thus violently opposing Jesus.

Something of his spirit can be seen in the arrest, the intimidation and the imprisonment of Christ's disciples,—and *more* in his compelling them to blaspheme, and all other efforts to force them to renounce Jesus failing in the fact that his vote against them was the death sentence. This was the measure of his inordinate zeal for the traditions of the fathers. (Gal. 1: 14.) This was the extremity (Gal. 1: 13) to which unbelieving ignorance (I Tim. 1: 13) could drive a man.

And all this is the more surprising because the innocent objects of his merciless crusade were of his own nation, his own brethren, who had not even said aught against the faith of the fathers, who were among the noblest and most to be admired people in the land, whose *only* fault was that they added to their *old* faith, faith also in Jesus of Nazareth as the Savior and Messiah.

With the purpose above indicated Saul plans a trip beyond the borders of Judea. There were many Jewish residents to be found in the cities of the surrounding nations. Among these were to be found believers in Jesus. According to Paul's own statement disciples could be found in *many strange cities*. (Acts 26: 11.) The first disciples of Jesus were not slow to teach others concerning the new and better way. Persecution at home only drove them forth bold and fearless missionaries of the cross. These preachers of the *Word* turned many to the Lord. Acts 8: 4 and 11: 19.

Saul selected as his objective point, Damascus, a city large and prosperous and the center of a considerable foreign Jewish population. And from the very fact that Saul chose this place as the point from which he meant to execute orders (Acts 9: 2) we may infer that there were disciples here. It is definitely stated later. (Acts 9: 19.)

Armed with Authority.—A hint as to Saul's mental state at this time can be obtained from Acts 9: 1. He himself declares that he had bitterly persecuted the disciples in the cities outside of Judea and Samaria before he sought authority to go to Damascus. (Acts 26: 11.) He now comes to seek authority from the high priest to go to Damascus. This high official was indeed a very proper person to approach in this matter. It will be remembered by the reader that the great Sanhedrin exercised a considerable degree of authority over Jews in foreign cities. This was especially true in regard to religious matters. The high priest at Jerusalem was the most distinguished Jewish authority, civil and religious, recognized by all the Jews. Since the loss of their National independence and their subjection as a tributary people, they sought to maintain the integrity of the nation and to preserve the body intact by their elaborate system of worship and priestly hierarchy. Very naturally the high priest would become the head of the nation. Associated with him as counsellors and members of the Great Sanhedrin, of which he was president, were seventy (some say seventy-two) men from among the chief priests, scribes and elders. In the high priest and these counsellors were vested with whatever civil power remained as well as the control of the religious affairs. This authority was recognized by the Jews in Damascus. The governor himself, whether he was a Jew or not, recognized the same authority. (II Cor. 11: 32.)

The application of Saul for letters was well received. The high priest did not hesitate to bring the matter before the

Sanhedrim, the whole body of which evidently consented to grant the request for authority without delay. (Acts 26: 10.) Thus armed the fearless and relentless persecutor was ready, upon being granted a proper escort (Acts 9: 7) to start for Damascus. And from thence, after having instituted the inquisitor's court and given the proper examination, to send in chains to Jerusalem both men and women of this way to be punished (Acts 22: 6) as the mercy of the murderer of Stephen might please!

On the Way.—The way to Damascus was at the best a tedious journey of five or six days. The route taken by Saul and his company is not now known, though whatever way he might choose he would have had bad roads to travel. With Saul were travelling certain men who were sent as deputies under him by the chief priests.

This long way gave Saul much time for sober reflection. There can, it seems to me, be no doubt that Saul recalled vividly the whole series of shameful tortures and deaths committed in connection with the persecutions of this blind sect of believers in a false Messiah, even from the death of Stephen to the last man or woman dragged at his own instance in chains before the merciless Sanhedrin.

And how could he but think upon the part he himself played in these tragic events. He, the not only persecutor but leader of the persecutors, the mad zealot of a fast decaying system of priestly arrogance and self-constituted authority, the proud Pharisaic champion of the passing shadow of a once splendid national glory, the learned in the law and prophets, how could HE escape his own thoughts? And what had these Nazarenes not suffered at his hands? Now the thought of the claims made by the disciples of Jesus maddens him, then he turns to their fortitude and simplicity of faith manifested under his cruel hand and fear and astonishment seizes him. But did not the prophets speak of a Messiah? And did not these Nazarenes call Jesus their Messiah? Does not this same Jesus give in some mysterious way just the peace and joy of life and the hope of immortality to his disciples that the highest ideal of the Messiah of prophecy could give? Yet he was crucified, abased and accounted a base blasphemer. Ah, he was false and these are but his deluded followers! But not so say his disciples. He was crucified but is in the very truth risen! We believe in him. And their faith—how their simple faith dearer than life proves the mystery all the greater. Perhaps indeed he is the Christ. If he is then what of my conduct and my false zeal? And